

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 05414 141505Z
ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2724
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 5414

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR IN
SUBJECT: A-7S FOR PAKISTAN

REF: STATE 081981

1. FOREIGN SECRETARY MEHTA CALLED IN THE CHARGE ON APRIL 14 TO DISCUSS THE JACK ANDERSON STORY ON THE REPROCESSING/A-7 ISSUE. HE BEGAN THE CONVERSATION BY REFERRING TO THE STATEMENT MADE IN THE PARLIAMENT BY FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE ON US SUPPLY OF SPARES FOR THE PAKISTAN RETROFIT TANK PROGRAM. MEHTA SAID THAT THIS STATEMENT AND DISCUSSIONS WITH US HAD BEEN KEPT IN LOW KEY BECAUSE THE GOI DID NOT WANT TO SPOIL THE ATMOSPHERE SO EARLY IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. VAJPAYEE HAD BEEN HIT WITH MANY SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS ON THE ISSUE WHICH, MEHTA NOTED, WAS A DELICATE ONE.

2. MEHTA THEN REFERRED TO THE JACK ANDERSON STORY AND SAID THE GOI HAD HAD SOME SUSPICION OF A "LOAN TO PAKISTAN" AND PAKISTAN'S INTENTION TO BUY STRIKE AIRCRAFT. MEHTA HAD RAISED THE ISSUE WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER WHO, MEHTA RECALLED, SAID THE SALE WAS "NOT INTENDED". MEHTA LATER RECALLED THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 05414 141505Z

SAID A DECISION WOULD BE LEFT OVER TO THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION.

3. MEHTA'S CONCERN WAS THAT IF THE JACK ANDERSON STORY WAS TRUE THIS WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THE IMPRESSION THE GOI RECEIVED FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND THERE WOULD BE A REACTION AND REPERCUSSIONS IN NEW DELHI AT A TIME WHEN THE CLIMATE FOR RELATIONS HAD IMPROVED. THE NEW GOVT, MEHTA ALSO REMARKED, WOULD SEE A

SALE OF A-7S AS SPOILING THE ATMOSPHERE AND WOULD WONDER WHY IT WAS TAKING PLACE WHEN THERE WAS HOPE ON THE INDIAN SIDE FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS. MEHTA ASKED IF THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAD SAID ANYTHING ABOUT THE STORY.

4. THE CHARGE REPLIED THAT HE DEPARTMENT HAD NOT MADE ANY COMMENT BUT IN ANY EVENT WOULD NOT SPEAK ABOUT NEGOTIATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION. HE SAID THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD, OF COURSE, REVIEW THE ENTIRE SITUATION ANEW. HE SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE US HAD THE REPROCESSING PROBLEM UNDER DISCUSSION THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS OR WAS ABOUT TO INITIATE DISCUSSIONS. THE CHARGE ALSO EXPLAINED THAT THE USG WAS SENSITIVE TO INDIAN CONCERNS ABOUT THE A-7 AND WAS TAKING THOSE CONCERNS INTO ACCOUNT.

5. MEHTA CONCLUDED THAT HE HOPED THE A-7 MATTER COULD BE SORTED OUT BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, IMPLYING THAT THERE WOULD BE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ON THE ISSUE (PARLIAMENT CONVENES MA 9 OR MAY 16).

6. FOLLOWING THE CONVERSATION REPORTED ABOVE, MEHTA TELEPHONED THE CHARGE TO NOTE THAT HE HAD ALSO SEEN SOME MENTION OF A SALE OF A-4S TO PAKISTAN. HE SAID THE GOI'S CONCERN WAS ABOUT THE EFFECT OF ANY STRIKE AIRCRAFT ON AN ARMS RACE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN. THE CHARGE NOTED THAT THE A-4 WAS QUITE AN OLD AIRCRAFT AND NOT AT ALL COMPARABLE TO THE A-7 AND SUGGESTED THAT MEHTA, WHO DID NOT SEEM PERSONALLY FAMILIAR WITH IT, CHECK WITH HIS AIR FORCE. MEHTA NONETHELESS STUCK TO HIS GUNS ABOUT GOI CONCERNS REGARDING A-4S AS WELL AS A-7S.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 05414 141505Z

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